

# Preface

## PURPOSE

The *Learning Results* identify the knowledge and skills essential to prepare Maine students for work, for higher education, for citizenship, and for personal fulfillment. Strongly supported by the public, the *Learning Results* are built on the premises that:

- **all students should aspire to high levels of learning;**
- **achievement should be assessed in a variety of ways; and**
- **completion of public school should have common meaning throughout the state.**

The *Learning Results* express what students *should know* and *be able to do* at various checkpoints during their education. The *Learning Results* serve to focus discussion and to develop consensus on common goals for Maine education. In identifying essential knowledge and skills to be achieved by Maine students, the *Learning Results* do not represent a curriculum nor do they reduce the school's responsibility for curriculum planning or determining instructional approaches. In fact, the *Learning Results* challenge communities, schools and teachers to work together in implementing effective instructional strategies to achieve high expectations for all students.

This document defines only the core elements of education that should apply to all students without regard to their specific career and academic plans. Every student is expected to achieve goals that are broader than those outlined by the *Learning Results*. At the high school level, for instance, many students heading directly to post-secondary study or to the workplace may require learning experiences that exceed the *Learning Results* in specific content areas.

The overriding purpose of the *Learning Results* is to provide teachers and parents with guidance to improve an existing education system that is already working well for many students in most Maine communities. The adoption of common standards and an accompanying mix of measures which assess learning is widely regarded as the most important next step in improving the quality of public education for all students.

## BACKGROUND

Following enactment of the Education Reform Act of 1984, Maine schools undertook a wide variety of initiatives designed to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Many of the lessons learned from those initiatives informed *Maine's Common Core of Learning*, a document published in 1990 that articulates a common vision for education in Maine by defining the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that all students should possess upon graduation from high school. In 1993, the Legislature directed the State Board of Education to undertake the next step in education reform by establishing a Task Force on *Learning Results* that was directed to:

"develop long-range education goals and standards for school performance and student performance to improve learning results and recommend to the commissioner and to the Legislature a plan for achieving those goals and standards."

After substantial work, the Task Force presented to the Legislature, in January of 1996, a report which contained a series of recommendations together with a set of standards, a plan for implementation, and proposed legislation. After a series of intense hearings during the 1996 Legislative Session, the Legislature adopted much of the work of the Task Force and directed the Department of Education and the State Board of Education to continue to develop the *Learning Results*.

Acting on the recommendations of the Task Force, the Legislature adopted six Guiding Principles which describe the characteristics of a well-educated person. To fulfill these principles, the Legislature required that the Department of Education and the State Board of Education develop *Learning Results* within the following eight areas:

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**Career Preparation  
English Language Arts  
Health and Physical Education  
Mathematics**

**Modern and Classical Languages  
Science and Technology  
Social Studies  
Visual and Performing Arts**

These are not "subjects" in the same sense that we use the word when referring to courses in school. They are areas of learning that will in some cases cut across a number of discrete courses or disciplines.

In response to the legislative directive, the Commissioner appointed a working group, known as the Critical Review Committee, to prepare a draft of standards for consideration by the State Board of Education and by the Legislature. The Committee met on numerous occasions during the summer and fall of 1996 to produce this revised document, which was approved in May of 1997 by the 118<sup>th</sup> Legislature.

## STRUCTURE

As a structure for *Learning Results*, each subject area has been divided into **Content Standards** which are broad descriptions of the knowledge and skills that students should acquire. Within each content standard is a series of **Performance Indicators** which help to define in more specific terms the stages of achievement, or checkpoints, toward meeting the content standard within each of four grade spans:

**pre-school to second grade (Pre-K-2);  
third and fourth grades (3-4);  
fifth through eighth grades (5-8); and  
secondary school.**

**Performance indicators** describe what students *should know* and *be able to do* from one level to the next to demonstrate attainment of a **content standard**. Good performance indicators are those that:

**focus on academics and are grounded in important content;  
combine both knowledge and skills;  
describe development in a concrete way from one stage to the next;  
define results and not methods of teaching;  
are clear and useful to parents, teachers, and students; and  
can be assessed, tested, and measured in a variety of ways.**

Broadly defined content standards are lettered, labeled, and described in the introduction to each area of learning. Under each content standard, the specific performance indicators are given numbers merely to identify them and not to imply an order of significance.

**Examples** are given after some of the indicators to clarify what the indicator means and how it might be addressed in the classroom. **Examples** are not part of the indicator or the content standard; they merely illustrate the standard by suggesting what a student might do as one step toward attainment. Please note that the examples may not demonstrate how learning can and should be integrated across content areas.

## INTEGRATED LEARNING

While the division of learning into content areas is necessary to form a structure for writing performance standards, this does not mean that teaching should be divided in any similar way. In many schools, both learning and assessment are often successfully integrated across several content areas at one time. For example, a science project may include historical research, data collection and mathematical analysis, followed by preparation of a narrative report with freehand illustrations, and conclude with a computer-assisted oral presentation to the class, thus combining, in this example, elements from at least five content areas into one project.

Teachers are encouraged to approach the standards from an interdisciplinary perspective when designing curriculum and planning instructional activities.

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*Maine's Common Core of Learning* articulated knowledge, skills, and attitudes in a non-disciplinary organization that is helpful when thinking about integrated teaching and learning. The four interdisciplinary areas identified in the *Common Core* are as follows:

## **Personal and Global Stewardship**

Responsible citizenship requires awareness and a concern for oneself, others, and the environment. It involves interactions not only within the self and family, but between the self and friends, the community, the nation, and the world. It includes the knowledge and care of all dimensions of our selves as humans, an understanding of the group process, and a willingness to exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. Stewardship also includes the study of current geography and foreign language and an appreciation of pluralism and human rights.

## **Communication**

The ability of human beings to communicate through a variety of media with a high degree of specificity is one of our most remarkable achievements. In a rapidly-changing world, communications skills will become ever more essential to our students' future success.

## **Reasoning and Problem Solving**

Knowledge is power. We must help students want to gain knowledge, show them how to get it, and encourage them to use it to reach a new understanding or to create a new product. We must help students learn to reflect on their processes of learning, regardless of their field of study.

## **The Human Record**

The study of the human record not only includes the actions and events of the past but also the constructs of human thought and creativity as they have evolved through time. The human record includes works of literature and the arts; scientific laws and theories; and concepts of government, economic systems, philosophy, and mathematics. In fact, much of what we now think of as "subject matter" in today's curriculum belongs in this section.

## CONTENT AND CRITICAL THINKING

Wherever education is publicly discussed, there is much debate over the balance between student acquisition of factual knowledge and critical thinking skills.

This debate is embraced, but not resolved by the *Learning Results*. The truth is that both content and thinking processes are important. Students need a common factual frame of reference grounded in the events of history, the structure of geography, the discoveries of science, and the richness of art, music, and literature; and they must also learn how to think, how to search and investigate, and how to evaluate, filter, and process the information that they uncover. All students need to learn, at least at some level, how to investigate like a scientist, evaluate like an historian, reason like a mathematician, and communicate like a writer and an artist.

Across the content areas of the *Learning Results* the higher order reasoning and thinking skills are often embedded within the language chosen for the performance indicator. For example, in Social Studies, students are often challenged to "evaluate," "analyze," and "explain," as much as to "identify," "recognize," or "describe" the content included within the standard.

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## RESULTS AND METHODS

In Maine and throughout the United States, there is controversy over the means and methods by which children are taught. In reading, there is the familiar debate over the merits of phonics versus whole language instruction. In mathematics, there is concern whether it is appropriate to de-emphasize mental computing skills that can now be performed using a pocket calculator, and in some communities parents are distressed by an apparent lack of structure or formality within certain classrooms.

It is not the place of this document to address methods of teaching or the organization of the classroom. Rather, this document focuses on results - not the means or methods by which students are taught. Some teachers prefer a structured classroom while others use a less formal setting. Further, it is not the place of this document to specify how many students should be in a classroom, what level of formality should prevail, or what instructional methods are most appropriate. These are matters for teachers, parents, and local administrators to resolve.

However, the state does have an obligation to monitor the results of student learning within our communities. That is the role of the state as dictated by the Maine Constitution.

## FOR ALL STUDENTS

One of the most commonly asked questions regarding the *Learning Results* is whether they apply to all students. These standards establish goals for what all students *should know* and *be able to do*, including students with unique learning needs and/or identified disabilities.

In order for all students to have appropriate opportunities to move toward achievement of the *Learning Results* and demonstrate mastery as they progress, schools will continue to design curriculum, instruction, and assessment opportunities that meet the needs of a diverse student population. A comprehensive, personalized planning approach will be helpful in this effort to identify and meet the unique needs of individual students.

Currently, students with identified disabilities have rights under federal and state special education laws - this does not change with the adoption of the *Learning Results*. A continuum of services and appropriate adaptations and modifications will still be available to students.

## ASSESSMENT

These *Learning Results* are just one part of an educational system. As goals for what all students should know and be able to do upon finishing school, they are not written to prescribe a minimum or "passing" standard. The setting of minimum requirements is the function of assessments that are separate from the creation of academic goals.

Because some students are ready for assessment at earlier stages than others, no assumption is made about when a standard might be achieved.

The statute passed in April of 1996 includes the following provisions relating to assessment:

Student achievement of the learning results . . . must be measured by a combination of state and local assessments to measure progress and ensure accountability. The 4th-grade, 8th-grade, and 11th-grade results of the Maine Education Assessment, the "MEA," are the state assessments used to measure achievement of the learning results. The 4th-grade and 8th-grade MEA must be used to measure achievement of the learning results beginning in the 1998-99 school year. The 11th-grade MEA must be used to measure achievement of the learning results beginning in the 1999-2000 school year. Local school administrative units may develop additional assessments to measure achievement of the learning results, including student portfolios, performances, demonstrations and other records of achievements.

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An Assessment Design Team comprised of Maine educators and assessment specialists has been established to redesign state level assessments and to assist in development of high quality local assessments that will be used to measure student achievement of the *Learning Results*. The statewide assessment system they are developing will:

**align with Maine's *Learning Results*;**  
**utilize multiple measures of learning;**  
**ensure fair and equitable assessment for all students;**  
**utilize recognized, relevant technical standards for assessment;**  
**provide understandable information to educators, parents, students, the public, and the media;**  
**provide professional development opportunities for teachers, administrators, and future educators; and**  
**be practical and manageable.**

## IMPLEMENTATION AND RESOURCES

Implementation of *Learning Results* is a local function. The *Learning Results* does not identify the resources, the methods, the relationships, and the concerns that need to be addressed to enable all students to achieve these standards. Schools and communities will establish their own unique approach to such issues as school organization and climate, innovative instruction and assessment, the fostering of higher order thinking skills, professional development, differences in student needs and learning styles, use of emerging technologies, and collaboration among participating groups and individuals.

*Learning Results* are not a curriculum. A full curriculum contains the detail about what students should know and be able to do within each area of learning at every grade level. It often prescribes materials and methods, contains reading lists and texts, while specifying course content and instructional sequence. The *Learning Results* describe a new literacy for all students in terms of knowledge and skills which schools may use in forming local curricula and designing assessment.

Aware that meeting the standards is neither easy nor without expense, the Legislature has stated that implementation is conditioned on added state funding for professional development. Further, districts may delay meeting the standards for career preparation, modern and classical languages, and visual and performing arts if they cannot be achieved within existing local resources.

## REVISION

This document was initially revised during the summer of 1996 by the Critical Review Committee. 3000 copies were circulated to schools primarily for peer review by educators. Over 2000 educators answered questionnaires and offered suggestions for further revision.

Based on those responses, the *Learning Results* were modified and broadly distributed to the public for hearings and formal reviews conducted jointly by the Department of Education and the State Board of Education during early 1997. The revision that finally resulted from that rule-making process was then presented to the Legislature for its review and approval, which, as mentioned previously, was granted in May of 1997.

Be advised that this is not a static or finished document, but rather a dynamic one designed to stimulate continuing discussion. The *Learning Results* will need to be revised periodically in light of experience, research, public commentary, and the products available from many other groups that are creating and refining similar documents.

Under their rule-making responsibilities, the Department of Education and the State Board of Education will retain jurisdiction to make changes in future years. Comments and suggestions are appropriately addressed to:

*Learning Results*  
Maine Department of Education  
23 State House Station  
Augusta, ME 04333-0023

This document is available at <http://www.state.me.us/education>, the Department of Education's home page on the World Wide Web.

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